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ABSTRACT

This executive summary describes the development and conclusions of a federally-funded research project designed to gain information on the process of research on instructional problems. The project's impact on inservice education practices for teachers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students is also described. The main purpose of the project was to determine what the effects would be and what changes would occur in the school district's inservice education program as a result of the locally conducted study. A second purpose of the study was to describe the nature of the collaborative process that evolved between the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the local school district. The report is devoted to five areas: (1) background and contextual information about the school district; (2) the collaborative relationship between SEDL and the school district; (3) the research approach that was employed in the study; (4) a discussion of the major findings; and (5) a brief summary of changes which the school district plans to implement in its inservice program for teachers of LEP children during the 1981-1982 school year. (JD)

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SP 019 116

Executive Summary

EFFECTS OF LOCALLY CONDUCTED RESEARCH ON POLICY AND PRACTICE REGARDING BILINGUAL INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

(NIE-400-80-0035)

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The following executive summary briefly describes the development and conclusion of a federally-funded research project designed to gain information on the process of research on instructional problems, and its impact on inservice education practices for teachers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. A local school district in the central Texas area, in conjunction with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), laid the groundwork for the study. As a result of this effort, the National Institute of Education (NIE) provided funding for a 12-month period, from October 1, 1980 to September 29, 1981.

The main purpose of the project was to determine what the effects would be and what changes would occur in the school district's inservice education program as a result of the locally-conducted study. The results were expected to provide educators nationwide with greater insight into the potential impact that locally-conducted research can have on policy and practice related to the recognition of educational concerns and approaches to solutions for the inservice education of teachers of LEP children.

A second purpose of the study was simply to describe the nature of the collaborative process that evolved between SEDL and the local school district. It is hoped that by understanding the procedures used and the collaborative process which aided the research project, school districts with similar needs and similar contextual characteristics could better deal with their own problems.

The remainder of this report is devoted to five separate areas, including the following: (1) background and contextual information about the school district; (2) the collaborative relationship between SEDL and the school district; (3) the research approach that was employed in the study; (4) a discussion of the major findings; and (5) a brief summary of changes which the school district plans to implement in its inservice

program for teachers of LEP children during the 1981-1982 school year.

The project site is a small, semi-urban community in southcentral Texas. It contains a number of small factories and a state-supported university which serve as the economic base for the community. Almost 45 percent of the population is Mexican American and more than half of these families earn an annual income which is below the national poverty level. As one might expect, the community is faced with the persistent problem of how best to educate a substantial number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) children.

The school district has directed special services to limited-English proficient students since 1970 when one of the schools implemented an open-classroom program for kindergarten students, including a bilingual component. This program was recognized for its exceptional quality, and was designated a Texas demonstration school in 1973.

Since 1977, a number of changes in the local schools caused the ideal situation to become a truly challenging one. The entire staff of the kindergarten school moved to a new campus during the summer of 1978 making it the K-1st grade school. At the same time, separate schools were established to serve grades 2-3 and grades 4-5, respectively. For the first time, teachers from neighborhood schools throughout the community joined together at these grade level schools for the entire school district. Thus, the administrative and instructional staff faced the task of integrating their overall bilingual program in totally new settings.

A high proportion of the teachers of LEP students were relatively new to bilingual education, making the organizational changes in the schools even more difficult. While the district had shown a definite commitment to the implementation of a bilingual program, the two primary obstacles that

remained were the recruitment of bilingual teachers and the need for inservice education of existing teachers.

The desire for improving the district's inservice program was very strong, but much remained to be done. There were not enough teachers employed in the district who were certified to work with bilingual and/or LEP students; of those who were, a large number needed to receive additional training in areas such as the teaching of the Spanish language, ESL, etc.

The school district had conducted needs assessments in the past but the efforts had focused largely on the selection of types of workshop topics. One of the main reasons for agreeing to collaborate with SEDL on this NIE-funded project was that both administrators and teachers felt a need to broaden the scope of the district's inservice education program for teachers of LEP students.

Collaborative Relationship Between SEDL and School District

When SEDL was in the process of initial site selection for the project, there seemed to be numerous advantages in forming a collaborative relationship with the school district which was ultimately selected. Some of the reasons for establishing this relationship included past contacts with the school district; mutual economic benefit; a sharing of power; and political expediency.

SEDL had had occasional professional contact with the school district prior to the initiation of the project. Although this contact between the two organizations was not extensive, it had been enough to permit the creation of mutual trust between some of the school district administrators, teachers and SEDL staff members.

Another reason for establishing a relationship with this particular school district was because of mutual economic benefit. SEDL was, in effect,

offering to come and conduct research free of charge that should help the school district improve its inservice education program. The school district, on the other hand, was cost effective for SEDL, since both organizations were located within the central Texas area.

A third reason for forming the collaborative relationship had to do with the sharing of power. The control of finances for project operation was under the auspices of SEDL through its NIE funding source, but the school district had exclusive power over access to teachers, school records and the collection of data.

Political expediency was yet a fourth reason for establishing a collaborative relationship. In short, by collaborating with one another, both organizations could work efficiently toward mutual goals. SEDL, for example, needed to find a site in which teachers and administrators had an ongoing bilingual program, a substantial number of LEP children, and a commitment by teachers and administrators to improve the quality of inservice education that the district provides for teachers. The school district, on the other hand, needed to find a way to conduct research on the needs of teachers, especially those who teach substantial numbers of LEP children. SEDL staff had the research skills needed to help them plan an appropriate research design for the project.

In order for the collaborative relationship between SEDL and the school district to be effective, a number of individuals were actively involved in the collaborative process. The highest level of staff who were involved in the project included the superintendent of the school district and the director of the bilingual division at SEDL. While communication between the two organizations did occur at this level, much of the responsibility for the project was delegated to other individuals of a lower echelon.

The director of bilingual programs, for example, was designated to be the chief contact person who would monitor the project closely and maintain frequent communication with SEDL's project director. Teachers also were involved in the collaborative process through their participation in project activities, the completion of questionnaires and interviews, representation on the advisory board, etc. They were involved to a great extent in the collaborative review of research findings.

The project director at SEDL provided the school district with suggested timelines and dates for completion of specified activities, and worked with SEDL's bilingual division director in submitting interim and final reports to NIE. He was also the chairperson at all project meetings and was responsible for collecting all of the data.

Like the individuals mentioned above, the project's advisory board also took on a very important role in the collaborative process. The advisory board meetings which were held at different times during the year were an important mechanism through which parents could be kept abreast of the project's progress and have an opportunity to offer feedback and suggestions for ways of improving the implementation and subsequent impact of the project.

Thus, the collaborative process involved a number of individuals, each of whom held different perceptions of the project, but who also were working toward the mutual goal of improving the inservice education training for teachers of LEP children.

Approach

The research approach that was undertaken could be described as having characteristics of both quantitative and qualitative types of methodology.

On the quantitative side, an effort was made to measure the needs, concerns and perceptions of teachers regarding the inservice teacher education program of the school district by using structured questionnaires containing Likert-type items. Descriptive statistics were then compiled from the various groups of teachers involved in the study to see how needs and concerns varied across schools, grade levels, content areas, etc.

Qualitative techniques of the general research approach differed from the more quantitative aspects by being more open-ended and yielding more subjective types of information. Ethnographic field notes were a main source of this information. Impressionistic notes were compiled by SEDL staff members at meetings of the advisory board, teachers and administrators. For purposes of optimal documentation, many of these meetings were taped so that the ethnographic notes would be as complete and accurate as possible.

The consensus reached by the school district and SEDL staff was that assessment instruments would be used to measure the following four dimensions which are relevant in planning inservice education:

1. *the type of bilingual program being implemented in grades K-5 (based primarily on time spent teaching Spanish/English at each grade level);*

2. *the perceived needs of teachers of LEP children for acquiring relevant skills and knowledge.*

3. *the level of implementation reached by teachers in critical components of the bilingual program (Spanish reading, ESL, English reading for LEP students, etc.); and*

4. *the types of concerns that teachers have regarding the teaching of different components of the bilingual program.*

Later, a fifth dimension was added in order to tap teachers' general knowledge about and attitudes toward the current and past inservice programs of the school district, and on the focus that the inservice program should take in future years.

Discussion of Findings

Some of the major findings from each of the five assessment instruments briefly are discussed below. A series of tables which present a more comprehensive view of the results can be found in the final technical report, as well as some of the teachers' comments, suggestions and reactions to the test instruments.

Professional Development Questionnaire. A rank order of the items on the PDQ showed that the areas of greatest need for teacher training were for "teaching reading" and "attending to behavior problems." More than half of all teachers completing this questionnaire felt that these areas were needed to a great extent. Specifically, when teachers were asked to tell why these two areas were given such a high priority, they stressed the need for all children to learn basic skills and to be able to read well. Also, the problems caused by ineffective classroom management take precious time away from the instruction of major content areas. One of the principals pointed out that all teachers could benefit from more workshops in the area of assertive discipline.

Several other areas which were of a slightly lower priority but were viewed as being needed to a great extent by more than 40 percent of all teachers were "attending to individual student differences" and "organizing materials and resources." Perhaps this results from the reality of desegregation in the schools and the fact that teachers now must deal with heterogeneous groups of children who have differing needs and abilities. It seems to be a positive sign that teachers are concerned with attending to the special needs of children, since it reflects their sensitivity to the importance of promoting every child's educational development.

In addition to the above results for all teachers, the bilingual teachers who responded to this questionnaire rated several other areas as being of a high priority for training: fostering the acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity and determining when a child is ready to transfer skills learned in the first language to the second language. While improvement in the relations between Anglos and Mexican Americans has continued to occur, bilingual teachers realize the necessity of even more improvement. The second area mentioned, transferring skills from L1 to L2, is an area which bilingual teachers across the United States are concerned with and which is in dire need of more research. Simply conducting inservice workshops in this area would not totally eliminate the need of teachers for more training in the future.

Interestingly enough, one of the areas which all teachers (including bilingual teachers) rated as "not desired" was to receive training in the philosophy and theory of bilingual education. When teachers were asked why this was of such a low priority the most common response was that they were tired of attending workshops stressing theory which could not readily be applied to the classroom. This type of statement has, of course, been made with increasing frequency by teachers throughout the nation, and suggests that some changes need to occur in inservice programs to insure that the needs of teachers are being met. It would have been less disturbing if teachers had said that they already knew a great deal about the philosophy and theory of bilingual education, but this was not the case; instead, the inability to apply these concepts was discouraging them to pursue further training in the area.

Concerns Questionnaire. This instrument was designed to measure the types of concerns that teachers have toward educational innovations such as

ESL, Spanish reading and English reading for LEP students. Only those teachers who were actually teaching in one of these areas were to complete the questionnaire. In the case of ESL, teachers from all three schools were very concerned with determining how to supplement and enhance the current ESL program. The need for a continuum of skills that teachers could use to evaluate a child's level of performance was suggested by several teachers as a means of enhancing the program. Other teachers admitted that they were not sure if they were providing the students with appropriate instruction. The lack of a structured ESL program may have caused the teachers at two of the schools to be concerned about not having enough time to get organized each day.

Some of the same concerns that had been expressed toward ESL were also noted in teaching English reading to LEP students. In addition, teachers were concerned about students' attitudes toward English reading. When asked to elaborate on their responses, they said that the children need to be motivated to read so that they will learn faster and enjoy their reading. At two of the schools, coordination of tasks and people is taking too much of the teachers' time. One reason for this, at least at the K-1 school, was that an open classroom environment results in teachers having to deal with numerous groups of children throughout the day. Teachers working in self-contained classrooms, on the other hand, do not have to deal with this situation to the same degree.

For bilingual teachers teaching Spanish reading, some of the strongest concerns were to know what other faculty are doing in the area and to determine how to supplement and enhance the Spanish reading program. In other words, teachers feel that the program could be improved, especially if better materials can be found or developed. Several of the teachers had

criticized some of the Spanish curricula for not being appropriate for the children, either because of difficulty level or dialect differences. Other concerns were very similar to those already mentioned by teachers of English reading to LEP students (i.e., attitudes toward English reading).

Level of Use Interview. A total of 82 interviews were conducted regarding the implementation of whichever innovation the teachers had responded to on the Concerns Questionnaire. Results of the ratings of each teacher's Level of Use (LoU) showed that teachers had been rated at one of four levels of the LoU scale. Slightly more than half of the teachers were rated as "Routine" users in which the innovation is being implemented with few or no changes being made and with minimal problems of management and organization. The next most commonly rated level was that of "Refinement" in which the teacher has mastered the innovation to the point that she/he has the resources to implement changes in order to increase the overall impact of the innovation on the students. Roughly 25 percent of the interviews were rated at the Refinement level.

An additional 12 interviews were rated as "Mechanical." Teachers at this level experience mild to severe problems in being able to implement the innovation, with poor organization of materials, inadequate planning, lack of behavioral management of students, etc. At least some of the teachers who had been rated "Mechanical" were either new to bilingual education or in their first year of implementing the innovation. With additional experience and training, one would expect the level of implementation to improve to at least the "Routine" level.

Several teachers were judged to have reached the "Integration" level in which they are similar to teachers at the "Refinement" level except that they now spend much time collaborating and sharing with other teachers in

order to combine their resources for a collective impact on students.

In conclusion, teachers who were interviewed as to Level of Use were found to be at different stages in the implementation process. It would seem desirable for new teachers and teachers who are having difficulty implementing the innovation to participate in a carefully planned inservice program geared to their needs. On the other hand, those teachers who have experienced much success in the implementation process could serve as role models and could help direct the inservice activities.

Bilingual Classroom Questionnaire. The results from this questionnaire were viewed by some teachers to be invalid; thus, they will probably not aid in designing an inservice program for teachers. Most teachers seemed to feel that the patterns obtained did not reflect what actually goes on in the classroom. For example, bilingual Spanish dominant children in kindergarten received an average of only 16% of their language arts' instructional time in Spanish, with 84% of the time being devoted to English.

Teachers were asked at campus meetings to try to explain why the results might be invalid. Several teachers felt that the language classification system had been confusing and that they had interchanged the English dominant and Spanish dominant bilingual students. Others may have been overwhelmed in completing the questionnaire since some teachers were rather rushed when the questionnaire was administered and they may not have understood the instructions. Another reason may have been the fact that the questionnaire does not ask for the exact numbers of students of a given language classification who are being instructed during a specified time period. For example, if a teacher checked the category of Spanish Dominant for an ESL class of 30 minutes each day, it is not possible to determine whether only one Spanish Dominant student was involved or whether there were 25 Spanish Dominant students, etc.

Survey of Perceptions of Inservice Training. The purpose of this instrument was to assess all teachers' knowledge and feelings toward the district-wide inservice program. Results were very informative to both administrators and teachers; only the most striking results will be discussed here.

Teachers were very much in agreement with the first Likert-type item of the survey. In fact, of 103 teachers, no one disagreed with the statement that "teachers should be given the authority to choose the type of inservice training program that they feel is appropriate for their school district." Thus, teachers in this school district seem to demand a more active rather than passive participation in the decisions that affect inservice training. Along the same token, they believe that their superiors do not understand their needs and should not attempt to diagnose their competencies. Only 33% of all teachers agreed that "principals and district administrators should diagnose the competencies of each teacher to determine the type of inservice training needed.

Another area in which teachers were united concerned the implementation of skills acquired in inservice training. About two-thirds of the teachers agreed that there is not enough assistance and feedback offered to teachers in implementing new knowledge and skills acquired through inservice training.

The time when inservice sessions should be scheduled was another issue which teachers viewed to be important. While virtually all teachers felt that to conduct inservice training during regular school hours is appropriate, almost two-thirds felt that to have inservice sessions immediately after school would be inappropriate. Only one teacher felt that weekends would be acceptable and virtually no teachers wanted to have inservice sessions planned during evening hours. Since inservice sessions in past years have

sometimes occurred on weekends or after school these results were important for the administrators to be made aware of.

At the end of the survey teachers were asked to note strengths and weaknesses of the current inservice program. There were 30 of a total of 75 teachers (or 40%) who stated that the fact that teachers choose topics for inservice sessions is a major strength of the district's program. Also, 16% stressed that the current inservice program is an improvement over ones from past years. However, 31% of the teachers listed irrelevant sessions and materials as representing a major weakness. An additional 15% felt that presenters of inservice sessions are inadequate.

When asked how one should go about planning inservice sessions, the most common responses were as follows: to survey teachers for topics; individualize inservice for each teacher and perform careful followup of training; hire more competent speakers; and schedule inservice workshops during the school day.

Changes Made in 1981-1982 Inservice Program

As of September 1981, several changes related to inservice teacher education had already been made and others were being planned as a result of SEDL's research study. The main changes that are being made deal with inservice for bilingual education teachers, thus, the changes will affect a large number of limited English proficient (LEP) students. While district administrators had already known before the study began that changes in the inservice program were needed, the study provided them with concrete data upon which to base these changes.

According to the director of bilingual education for the school district a number of changes will be made in bilingual inservice when compared to last year's program. The following list comprises the major changes that are being implemented:

- *Teachers are to decide for themselves what types of sessions they would like to have and what topics should be discussed. Last year, bilingual teachers were told which sessions to attend.*
- *Although teachers will have a major role in choosing topics for inservice training, administrators will still be able to veto teachers' decisions, in the event of conflicts (i.e., administrators may feel that some aspects of bilingual education theory are essential to include in the inservice plan, especially for certain teachers).*
- *Inservice training will be individualized as much as possible, especially for new teachers.*
- *Inservice sessions which were formerly held on Saturdays will be scheduled during the regular school day and will be ongoing.*
- *An increased emphasis will be made in looking at the special needs of teachers, depending upon the school and grade level at which they teach.*

In addition to the above changes, the ESL program is being modified drastically in the following ways:

- *Since teachers expressed a strong need for more help and training in ESL, a structured continuum of skills will be developed to serve ESL teachers from grades 2-6. Last year the continuum of skills existed for grades K and 1 only.*

- *ESL teachers will receive individualized inservice training, with teachers in the same schools collaborating with each other as much as possible.*

- *Teachers may now teach ESL during a scheduled class period or they may opt to incorporate ESL into the class curriculum throughout the day.*

- *While much leeway is given to teachers concerning the manner in which they implement ESL, they will be accountable for the quality of their performance and will be monitored.*

An important implication emerging from the study is that school districts might be wise in trying to individualize their inservice programs for teachers as much as possible since teachers appear to be quite heterogeneous in educational background, experience, ability and professional interests. This individualization of training, however, should be the direct result of a comprehensive needs assessment similar to the one conducted in this study.

In conclusion, the fact that changes were made in the school district's inservice education program for bilingual teachers as a direct result of the findings from this study attest to the success of the study in fulfilling its purpose. Not only were changes made in the inservice program but the development of English as a second language (ESL) materials for teachers of LEP children also occurred because of the study's findings. What will be important to follow up in the future will be the reactions of teachers to these changes, and ultimately, it will be important to determine whether LEP children are in fact benefiting in their education from an improved effort to meet their special needs.